

“He’s in the World Today”

1. Share the Good News

John 21:1-19

One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is found in 2 Kings 7. The king of Aram attacked the city of Damascus. This was a walled city. So the city closed its gates and tried to wait out the siege. The siege went on so long that the people in the city were starving. Now, there were four lepers who were outside the city wall. They were in a tough spot. If they stayed outside the city, they would be killed when the Aramean army attacked. If they could get into the city, they would starve. They decided that the next morning they would go to the camp of the Arameans and beg for mercy. It was a long shot, but it was their only hope. Well, that night God sent a sound in the camp of the Arameans like a mighty army attacking. The Arameans soldiers were so frightened that they just jumped up and ran, leaving everything behind.

The next morning the four lepers went out to the camp of the Arameans, planning to beg for their lives. Instead, they found the empty camp. All the tents and food and clothes and money were there. These men went from being beggars to being wealthier than they had ever imagined. They ate all they could. Then they began hauling off the money and clothing and hiding them.

Then one of the lepers said, “What we are doing is wrong. This is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, we will be found guilty; therefore let us go and tell the king’s household.” So they went to the city and told the people about all the food and wealth waiting for the taking. At first the people didn’t believe them. But they had nothing to lose. So they went out to the camp and found the food and other things. They were saved from starving by the lepers who were willing to share the good news.

I think these lepers were very much like the disciples on Easter. As they were hiding in the Upper Room following the crucifixion of Christ, they were about as hopeless as those lepers. Even if they found a way to escape from Jerusalem without getting caught and arrested, they faced a bleak and hopeless life. The savior was dead. All their hopes and dreams died with him.

Then, suddenly, all that changed. The Resurrected Christ came to them there in that Upper Room, and everything changed. They went from desperate hopelessness to discovering they had wealth and riches far beyond their wildest dreams. So, they sat there in the Upper Room and celebrated. They didn’t tell anyone what had happened except Thomas, who was not there that night. Jesus appeared to them a week later, when Thomas was there. Again, the disciples celebrated and didn’t tell anyone else about the good news of Christ’s resurrection.

Finally, sometime later, Jesus appeared to the disciples when they were fishing in the Sea of Tiberias. That’s another name for the Sea of Galilee. This time Jesus took Peter aside. He asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Each time Peter said, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” And each time Jesus said something like, “Then feed my sheep.”

What was Jesus saying? He was saying, "Look, Peter, you are the leader of these disciples. This is the third time I have appeared to you guys, and so far none of you have told anyone about it. I wasn't crucified and resurrected to save eleven people. I went through all this to save the world. There is a world of people who are starving to death for the good news of the Resurrection and eternal life. If you love me, get busy. Get out there and share the story. The sheep of my flock are starving. Feed their souls with the good news."

I believe that is what Jesus is saying to us as well. Has the Risen Christ appeared to you? Many of you can say, "Yes. He has." You have had mountaintop experiences when the presence of Christ was as real as this altar.

The Bible tells us that Christ appeared to the disciples for forty days following his resurrection. Then he ascended into heaven. But Christ has not stopped appearing to people. Christ appeared to Paul as he was on the road to Damascus several months later. And the Risen Christ has continued to appear to people to this very day through the Holy Spirit.

Christ comes to each of us differently. He first came to me when I was praying alone in a church at the altar rail during a prayer vigil, when I had a vision. I suddenly found myself at the foot of the cross, looking up at Christ as he writhed in pain. When I could no longer stand seeing how much he was suffering, suddenly I found myself in the tomb, looking down on the dead body of Christ. I was about to be overcome with grief and despair, when, again suddenly, I was lying prostrate before Christ, as he was sitting on the throne of glory. I asked for and was given permission to reach out and touch his foot.

Since that evening, Christ has been my constant companion. When I turn to him, he is there. When we sing, "I serve a Risen savior, he's in the world today," those aren't just words to me. That's my experience.

There is nothing this world has to offer which can match walking through life in fellowship with Christ. Jesus told parables in which he compared it to a man finding a buried treasure, or a merchant finding a pearl of great price. Those, of course, are pale comparisons. Treasures cannot give you joy. They can buy pleasures. But you cannot buy joy. The Risen Christ brings us a life of eternal joy.

I know that the Risen Christ has come to many of you. He comes to each of us differently. I told some of you this story one evening after one of Fred Trevino's Lenten messages. Bear with me while I share it with the others. There was a man who spent the evening at a pub and had too much to drink. At closing time, he decided to take a short cut through a cemetery to walk home. Well, he stumbled into an open grave. When he sobered up enough to realize where he was, he said a prayer. He said, "Lord, if you will get me out of this grave, I will change my life. And I will lead as many people to you as I can." Well, the caretaker came by about that time and heard the commotion and helped him out. The man was true to his word. He gave his life to the Lord. After that, each evening he would return to the pub. When he saw someone who had had too much to drink, he would lead him out into the cemetery and push him into an open grave. He wanted everyone to have the same experience he had had.

That's just not the way it works. Christ comes to each of us differently. Some of you have walked with Christ since you were a small child. You can't remember a time when Christ wasn't real to you. Some of you first met Christ at an Emmaus Walk.

Maybe Christ came to you during a time of crisis. Maybe you first saw him in the love and goodness of another person. There is no end to the creativity of Christ. He comes to each of us in the time and in the way best suited for us. The only thing that all these different experiences of Christ have in common is that they are joyful.

And the only thing better is helping someone else know Christ.

In my first church, there was an old man who had been a member of the church most of his life. His daughter and grandchildren were active in the church. He had been known for his quick temper. He always seemed to be irritated about something. A couple of years after I got there, he came to me one day. He said, "I've been going to church all my life. But I never knew you could have a personal relationship with Christ until you came here and start talking about it." That old man came to know the Lord.

And how he changed! The problem was that he had been hungry all his life. You know how irritable people get when they are hungry. That was his problem. He was so quick to fly off the handle because he was hungry. He was spiritually hungry. He finally found the one who could satisfy his hunger. He feasted on the manna from heaven. And he became one of the gentlest, sweetest men you would ever hope to meet.

When I saw what had happened to him, I knew that if nothing else good ever came from my ministry, I had had a great ministry. What a joy it is to see someone come into fellowship with the Risen Christ and know that you had a part in it.

I am certain that many of you can say the same thing. I know that many of you have shared your walk with Christ with others.

Let me just ask you, if Christ is real in your life, will you please stand? Thank you. You may be seated. You know that Christ lives, because the Risen Christ has come to you.

You are like those lepers who found treasures beyond their wildest imagining. You are wealthy beyond all measure. You have been feasting on the manna from heaven.

But Jesus didn't give you this wealth to keep to yourselves. He expects you to share it with those who are still closed in, starving behind locked doors. Don't keep the good news to yourself. Tell them what you have found, and invite them to come out and see for themselves.

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